

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism



Class

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Editorial

In the turmoil of recent years, concepts previously relegated to the dustbin of history have returned: particularly fascism (or the far right), socialism, and class.

But what does class mean in the 21st century? Does it look the same as it did in the 20th, or even 19th centuries? And what might the answers mean for those of us who wish to dismantle it?

In this issue of Fightback, we offer a number of angles on these questions: Bronwen Beechey considers whether the recently developed concept of 'intersectionality' can be integrated with socialist class analysis (pages 2-5), Ani White addresses whether there is a 'middle class' (or 'Professional-Managerial Class') in capitalist society (pages 6-10), Daphne Lawless looks at

the class basis of NIMBYism (pages 11-14), and Byron Clark exposes the ruling-class backers that allow the renewed far right to thrive (pages 15-18). Finally, for a broader theoretical perspective, Victor Osprey reviews the book *Dialectics of Revolution: Hegel, Marxism, and its critics through a lens of race, class, gender, and colonialism* by Kevin B. Anderson (pages 19-26).

We hope the reader finds value in these various angles on the question of class in the 21st century.



Intersectionality and class

By **BRONWEN BEECHEY**

The concept of intersectionality originates from a 1989 article by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law studies professor and one of the founders of Critical Race Theory. While Critical Race Theory (CRT) has become one of the latest spectres haunting the right-wing in the US, it originated in the 1980s and 90s among a group of legal scholars, including Crenshaw, who took issue with the liberal consensus that discrimination and racism in the law were irrational and “that once the irrational distortions of bias were removed, the underlying legal and socioeconomic order would revert to a neutral, benign state of impersonally apportioned justice.” Crenshaw and other CRT founders argued that racism was not an aberration that could be legislated out of existence, highlighting the continuing economic inequality between whites and minorities, and the lack of minority representation

in supposedly “colour-blind” institutions such as universities. Instead, Crenshaw wrote, discrimination continued due to the “stubborn endurance of the structures of white dominance” – in other words, the American legal and political system was inherently racist.

The concept of intersectionality came from the ideas debated in CRT. Crenshaw’s 1989 article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, published in the *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, centred on three legal cases that dealt with issues of both racial and sex discrimination. Each case, Crenshaw argued, demonstrated the limitations of a single-issue analysis of how the law considers racism and sexism.

For example, *DeGraffenreid v General Motors* was a 1976 case where five black women sued General Motors over its seniority policy. General Motors never hired black women until 1964, and so when seniority-based layoffs occurred after a recession in the early 1970s, all of the black women were laid off. The women argued that General Motors seniority policy was discriminatory on both racial and gender grounds. However, the court refused to consider the two categories together, stating in the words of the judge that “black women” could not be considered as a separate, protected class, as to do so would open up a “Pandora’s box” of minorities who would demand protection by the law.

Crenshaw argued that the 1976 case and others ignored the specific challenges facing black women as a group. She wrote:

The point is that Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional. Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.

In a 2017 interview, Crenshaw said that “Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.”

Intersectionality is also linked with the development of identity politics, a concept that was first articulated in a public statement by a black feminist social work, the Combahee River Collective. The statement highlighted the need to “develop a politics that was anti-racist, unlike those of white women, and anti-sexist, unlike those of black men.” It concluded:

Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work. This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical

politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression.

Identity politics was criticised by many on the left, on the basis that it encouraged an inward-looking focus that elevated differences between activists and emphasised the importance of lived experience over the development of solidarity between different groups. It was also criticised for creating “hierarchies of oppression” where the more types of oppression an individual suffered from, the higher their status. Others pointed out that identity politics was co-opted by the mainstream political parties, allowing them to present progressive legislation on women’s rights and LGBT+ issues while continuing their austerity policies toward workers and the poor. Intersectionality can be seen, at least in part, as a response to the limitations of identity politics, although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

The concept of intersectionality was quickly picked up by other academics, who applied it to queer theory, feminist legal theory and numerous studies on race, gender and sexuality. Over time, it began to appear outside academia. In 2015, “intersectionality” was added to the Oxford English Dictionary, and shortly after the term became widely, though not always accurately, used in mainstream media. It quickly became associated with North American feminist campaigns such as Me Too and the 2017 Women’s March on Washington. As a result, “intersectionality” was added to the vocabulary of right-wingers as a term of abuse, along with “political correctness”, “cancel culture” and “privilege checking”. It was variously described as “a new caste system”, “a conspiracy theory of victimisation”, and representing a form of feminism that “puts a label on you. It tells you how oppressed you are. It tells you what you’re allowed to say, what you’re allowed to think.”

Interestingly, a number of conservative commentators have acknowledged that intersectionality as an idea or legal concept is valid. Right-wing commentator Ben Shapiro, who has described intersectionality as “really dangerous,” told Vox that “the original articulation of the idea by Crenshaw is accurate and not a problem” The issue for conservatives is the application of intersectionality beyond the academic sphere, where it is perceived as an attempt to invert an existing hierarchy of oppression so that white, straight, cisgender men are on the bottom. In response, Crenshaw points out that her aim is not to replicate existing power dynamics but to remove those power dynamics altogether. She adds that “There have always been people, from the very beginning of the civil rights movement, who had

denounced the creation of equality rights on the grounds that it takes something away from them.”

Less predictably, intersectionality has also been criticised by left-wing and Marxist commentators. These critiques are focused on the role of class, which is recognised in intersectional theory as a form of oppression, but not given any more importance than other forms such as race, gender or sexuality; whereas Marxism traditionally views class as the primary form of oppression. Some of these arguments have been crudely reductionist, arguing that any discussion of race, gender and sexuality is a diversion from the class struggle. These arguments seem to assume that the working class is composed primarily of white men, a situation that has not existed for at least the past 30 years, if ever.

Other Marxist scholars, such as Barbara Foley, Eve Mitchell and Asad Haider, recognise the importance of anti-racist, feminist and queer issues, but argue that these “identities” are largely a product of capitalist social relations. According to Foley:

...the ways in which “race” and gender—as modes of oppression—have historically been shaped by the division of labor can and should be understood within the explanatory framework supplied by class analysis, which foregrounds the issue of exploitation, that is, of the profits gained from the extraction of what Marx called “surplus value” from the labor of those who produce the things that society needs.

Eve Mitchell describes intersectional theory as in part, a response to the marginalisation of women of colour in the 1960s and 1970s feminist, Black Power, and other anti-racist organisations. She states:

It is important to note that identity politics and intersectionality theorists are not wrong, but they are incomplete. Patriarchal and racialized social relations are material, concrete and real. So are the contradictions between the particular and universal, and the appearance and essence. The solution must build upon these contradictions and push on them...Embracing womanhood, organizing on the basis of blackness, and building a specifically queer politics is an essential aspect of our liberation. It is the material starting point of struggle.

However, both Mitchell and Haider argue, the essential next step is to move beyond organising around identity and towards an understanding that solidarity between all those oppressed by capitalism is the only way to defeat it.

Other Marxist commentators argue that there is no incompatibility between intersectionality and Marxism. Sofa Saio Gradin, a queer non-binary Marxist, writes:

Radical queerness and anti-racism are not forms of identity politics; and class struggle is not free from questions of identity. All forms of social life are *already* coded by class, race, gender and disability, so there are no forms of politics or struggle that exist outside these structures of social power. The claim that intersectional critiques distract from the ‘real struggle’ or are divisive is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of both intersectionality and socialism: the question is not whether the two can be integrated, but how.

In her 2020 book, *Marxism and Intersectionality: Race, Gender, Class and Sexuality under Contemporary Capitalism*, Ashley Bohrer also argues that “a thorough analysis of capitalism requires insights and tools from both Marxist and intersectional traditions.” She adds, in a recent interview:

We can’t understand race (in its gendered, sexualised, ability-laden senses) without understanding that the modern notion of race was invented in a capitalist world, that we all experience race in a capitalist world. There is no separating any of these categories from capitalism *and there is no separating capitalism* from race, gender, sexuality, ability or nationality.

The role of intersectionality in Aotearoa New Zealand is particularly relevant in a nation that Marxists describe as a colonial-settler state. Like Australia, Canada and the United States, Aotearoa New Zealand was settled by Europeans as part of an imperialist project, where the colonising nation (England) displaced and often physically extinguished the indigenous population with the aim of seizing its resources. Later waves of migration brought other nationalities in, particularly Pacific Islanders who were used as a cheap labour force following the post-Second World War boom. As a result, a large percentage of the working class in New Zealand (if not the majority) are Māori, Pasefika or other ethnicities such as Chinese or Indian. This has given class struggle an intersectional dimension. To give one example, the support of unions for the occupation of Takaparawhau/Bastion Point in the 1970s was instrumental in ensuring that, even after the occupation was violently ended by police and army, construction was not able to proceed.

The effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic in Aotearoa NZ also can be seen through an intersectional lens. The most affected community in

the wave of the delta strain has been the Pasefika community. This is due to several factors. Firstly, many of the “essential workers” who have been working through the lockdowns – medical staff, retail workers, supply chain and transport workers – are Pasefika or Māori and therefore at greater risk. These workers are low paid and generally live in substandard, overcrowded housing. It is also customary in Pasefika and Māori cultures for elderly family members to be cared for at home by relatives, meaning that COVID-19 (particularly the Delta variant) spreads rapidly and affects both the old and the very young.

The importance of the church to the majority of Pasefika families has resulted in super-spreader events at large church services, and some churches have shared anti-vax conspiracy theories among their followers. Historical memories of the Dawn Raids and racism has created an understandable distrust of government; and there are many in the community who have overstayed work visas and are reluctant to go to vaccination or testing centres (although there is no restriction on eligibility due to immigration status).

Added to this is the chronic underfunding of health services, particularly in South Auckland where the majority of Pacific peoples live.

The low vaccination rate among Māori can also be explained by the legacy of colonialism, where Māori were dispossessed of their land and food sources, had their language and culture suppressed and lost thousands to diseases introduced by the settlers. Māori in rural areas have limited access to health services and transport. Disinformation about vaccines has also had an impact, feeding into general distrust of government and health policies that have disadvantaged and discriminated against Māori in the past.

Taking an intersectional approach means supporting efforts by Māori and Pasefika communities to organise vaccination and testing at marae, churches and other sites where community members feel comfortable, and to develop resources in their own languages to encourage vaccination and counter disinformation. It means supporting efforts by Māori and Pasefika to counter food insecurity. It means calling on the government to increase benefits and wages and build more public housing. And it means supporting the fight against climate change, which in many areas is already being led by Pasefika and Māori youth.

The COVID-19 pandemic is showing us that capitalism is prepared to sacrifice millions of lives to keep its profits coming. The majority of those lives are those of the poor and people of colour. At the same time, there have been countless examples of solidarity in responding to the pandemic. This solidarity can be built upon a basis of understanding that different people experience oppression in different ways, as well as understanding the common cause of that oppression – a system that considers certain lives to be expendable so that the rich can survive.



Is there a ‘middle class’ or a ‘Professional-Managerial Class’?

By ANI WHITE

In common vernacular, the concept of a ‘middle class’ has currency. 70% of Americans think of themselves as ‘middle-class.’¹ It may seem bluntly obvious to many that there is a middle class. But what is the middle class?

Classical Marxists have tended to define the working-class as those who draw their income from work rather than capital, which would include most who self-identify as ‘middle class.’ Conversely, sociologists

have tended to divide society into multiple classes by income, status, and other indicators. Recently, the concept of a ‘Professional-Managerial Class’, or PMC, has gained currency on the left.

So, is there a middle class? Is this the same thing as the ‘petite bourgeoisie’, or the ‘Professional-Managerial Class’? What might the answers to these questions mean for those of us who aim to take on capitalism?

1 Martin, Emmie. “70% of Americans consider themselves middle-class – but only 50% are.” CNBC, Jun 30 (tinyurl.com/cnbc-middle).

Professional-Managerial Class

We will start with the concept of the Professional-Managerial Class, currently popular in 'democratic socialist' circles around Bernie Sanders. This concept was originally coined by Barbara and John Ehrenreich, founding theorists of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), partly to address a descriptive limitation in classical Marxism.

In a classical Marxist conception, capitalist society ultimately polarises into two classes: workers who sell their labour, and capitalists who exploit it. Although there is a 'petite bourgeoisie', comprising mainly small business owners but also other middle strata, classical Marxists have tended to argue they will dissolve into one of the two major camps, often because economic insecurity would lead to proletarianisation. The Ehrenreichs argued a new class had emerged over the 20th century: the Professional-Managerial Class, defined as salaried, educated workers who do not control the means of production but are relatively privileged, and employed to reproduce capitalist social relations.²

Although the Ehrenreichs do identify a historical dynamic needing further investigation, one central problem with the PMC category is the equation of professional and managerial. Professional simply means 'high-skilled', admittedly by a definition that devalues the skills of other workers. This may include a nurse, a tutor, or an IT worker, and any of these may be employed under poor conditions. Managerial simply means managing workers: it includes those who manage the nurses, tutors and IT workers categorised as 'professional.'

Managers are generally expected to enforce the company line, so even if they don't own capital, they may perceive contradictory interests with subordinate workers. Furthermore, managers may also wear a blue collar. So, you can be a professional without being managerial, or managerial without being a professional. Who does the average IT worker manage? Is the average IT worker in the same position as their office manager? The assumption that anyone wearing a white collar plays a managerial role does not stand up to scrutiny, but the PMC category does not make the distinction.

The PMC was the target of the recent book *Virtue Hoarders: The Case Against the Professional-Managerial Class* by Catherine Liu, which is an influential in circles such as popular socialist magazine *Jacobin*.³ An excoriating critique of Liu's shallow historical account and populist politics can be found on *Libcom*'s article "The PMC and the Tucker Carlson Left",⁴ but I want to zero in on the author's facile culturalist assumptions about *class*. These are asserted in the introduction:

The much-maligned Hillary Clinton was honest in her contempt for ordinary people when, in 2016, she dismissed Trump supporters as "deplorables." Their 2016 defiance of PMC and liberal *nostra* has only hardened into reactionary antiauthoritarianism, which another reactionary demagogue will seek to exploit. PMC virtue hoarding is the insult added to injury when white-collar managers, having downsized their blue-collar workforce, then disparage them for their bad taste in literature, bad diets, unstable families, and deplorable child-rearing habits.

The equations here are revealing – Trump supporters equal blue collar working-class, liberals equal white-collar managers. What data does the author marshal to back up this argument? Nada. We in *Fightback* have argued before, on the basis of exit polls and other data, that Trump's support is primarily among the petite bourgeoisie and wealthier sections of the working-class⁵ – putting it simply, those earning over 50k tended to vote Trump, those earning under 50k tended to vote Democrat.⁶ In keeping with the hoary clichés of the Conservative Left,⁷ Liu goes on to attack the PMC for their 'culture wars':

When the tide turned against American workers, the PMC preferred to fight culture wars against the classes below while currying the favor of capitalists it once despised.

If anything is an insult to low-paid workers, it's the assumption that they are on the conservative side of the culture wars, in other words opposing rights for various social minorities. Once again, the author marshals precisely no hard evidence for this, only her own assumptions. In fact, a majority of

2 Ehrenreich, John and Barbara. "The Professional-Managerial Class", in *In Between Labor and Monopoly Capital* (Pat Walker ed). South End Press. 1979

3 Liu, Catherine. *Virtue Hoarders: The Case against the Professional-Managerial Class*. University of Minnesota Press. 2020

4 Comrade Motopu. "The PMC meets the Tucker Carlson Left", *Libcom*, 21 Feb 2021 (tinyurl.com/libcom-pmc).

5 White, Ani. "What is the base of right-wing populism", *Fightback*, 17 Mar 2021 (tinyurl.com/populism-base).

6 Zhang, Christine; Burn-Murdoch, John. "By numbers: how the US voted in 2020", *Financial Times*, 8 Nov 2020 (tinyurl.com/trump-2020-base).

7 Lawless, Daphne. "Against "conservative leftism": why reactionary responses to neoliberalism fail", *Fightback*, 16 Feb 2016 (tinyurl.com/conservative-leftism).

Americans support progressive measures such as marriage equality.⁸

Liu contends that the shift towards capitalist-led 'culture wars' occurred after 1968. If there is a kernel of truth to the critique, it's that capital has appropriated progressive symbols for its own benefit. However, this is in large part a concession to social movements, and would not work as branding if progressive social change did not have popular support. Discrediting Black Lives Matter because corporations post the slogan on Twitter is like discrediting Che Guevara for appearing on T-shirts. It's admittedly true that at the height of neoliberalism, neoliberals were able to win over swathes of leftish-liberal middle class support, however this apparent consensus has been in crisis since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

Liu comes to the point when she associates Elizabeth Warren's campaign with 'PMCs', and Bernie Sanders' campaign with resistance to their dominance. However, this perceived gulf between Bernie Sanders' and Elizabeth Warren's politics reveals a limited political imagination. For all his rhetoric, Bernie Sanders equates 'socialism' with the police and army,⁹ as mayor of Burlington supported the arrest of anti-war protestors,¹⁰ and has repeatedly backed the centrist candidates openly loathed by his vocal left flank.¹¹

Accusations against PMC Democrats can be diagnosed in many cases as projection. This echoes the old-fashioned sectarian Marxist deployment of 'petite bourgeois' as pejorative for anyone the sectarian disagrees with, by such a broad definition that it usually encompassed the people making the accusation. Catherine Liu herself is an academic, undoubtably a position that would be attacked as PMC if she supported Warren. The term PMC itself is hardly used beyond prolific Twitter users, who constitute around 2% of the US population and tend to be higher income than average (in a statistic worthy of Occupy Wall Street, 10% of Twitter users create 80% of the tweets).¹²

Liu admits to her membership in the PMC herself, and casts herself as a traitor to her class. However, without anything in the way of an empirical analysis of economic class, or an admission that the PMC *in general* are politically divided, casting

herself as a noble exception is precisely the kind of individualistic moral positioning that she denounces, albeit with a more militant rhetoric in line with the times. In general, Liu's insistence on her anti-liberalism is protesting too much, as she's ultimately backing a Democratic electoralist strategy with no perspective for building working-class self-organisation.

The reality is that the various middle strata of class society are divided by liberal, conservative and even radical politics (especially during periods of upheaval). It's not even necessarily true that left liberalism is predominant in the middle class as Liu and many others contend: upper-income workers and the petite bourgeoisie tend to support right-wing populism. Likely as a Humanities academic, Liu has encountered many leftish liberals without a serious critique of capitalism, but this is just one slice of the various professions identified as PMCs. Liu's 'class analysis' essentially replicates the arguments of mainstream right-wing populism, repeating Murdoch talking points such as casting anti-sexual violence campaigns as irrational panics, rather than conducting an independent empirical investigation of class composition.

Although Liu's book does outline the basic political economy of the global financial crisis, it does nothing to define economic class, ironic for an author who insists on the 'antimaterialist' nature of her political opponents. Liu justifies this theoretical looseness with a rhetorical gesture that her approach is polemical rather than 'objective', as if that lets her off the hook of actually analysing class society.

What is class composition today?

It should be obvious to anyone familiar with socialist, or communist approaches to class that an analysis of its economic character is the necessary starting-point. As previously outlined, classical Marxists tend to define class in terms of relation to production. More popular definitions tend to focus on income, or consumption habits. So how do we conceive class composition today?

8 PRRI Staff. "Dueling Realities: Amid Multiple Crises, Trump and Biden Supporters See Different Priorities and Futures for the Nation", PRRI, 19 Oct 2020 (tinyurl.com/majority-marriage).

9 Healey, Patrick. "Preparing to Define Democratic Socialism, Bernie Sanders Points to Public Libraries and the Police", The New York Times, 19 Oct 2015 (tinyurl.com/police-socialist).

10 Seelye, Katharine Q. "As Mayor, Bernie Sanders Was More Pragmatist Than Socialist", 25 Nov 2015, The New York Times (tinyurl.com/bernie-protestors).

11 Sullivan, Eric; Sullivan, Kate. "Bernie Sanders endorses Joe Biden for president", CNN, 14 April 2020 (tinyurl.com/bernie-biden).

12 Wojcik, Stefan; Hughes, Adam. "Sizing Up Twitter Users", Pew Research Center, 24 Apr 2019 (tinyurl.com/very-online).

Taking Sydney as their case study, Political Scientists Lisa Adkins et al argue that contemporary class should be conceived in terms of financial assets – particularly housing – rather than income.¹³ This argument draws on the influential work of Thomas Piketty, who emphasises the accumulation of wealth over income.¹⁴ The Anglosphere has very inflated housing markets – Aotearoa New Zealand has the second fastest growing house prices in the world¹⁵ – against a backdrop of steep inequality.

Marxists also define class based on property rather than income, but whereas classical Marxists emphasise the property of *employers*, Piketty's followers emphasise assets such as *housing*. In studying the financialisation of everyday life in Australia, political economists Dick Bryan and Mike Rafferty conceive of class as having both industrial and financial dimensions. They note that industrial and financialised views of capitalism can be complementary:

The industrial, workplace-centred view and the financialised view are compatible in many ways. People work for wages or income and produce a surplus and also live in households and absorb risk. In this dimension the financialised view is just adding a new emphasis.¹⁶

This new emphasis on financial assets is partly due to a shift within the composition of capital. Financial capital has come to predominate over industrial capital.¹⁷ Related to this financialisation, it seems hard to deny that the inflation of housing assets in recent decades has created a 'middle class' relying on assets rather than wages (Daphne Lawless' article in this issue goes into the implications of this for recent clashes over housing in Aotearoa New Zealand).

Sociologists also distinguish between economic capital and cultural capital.¹⁸ Cultural capital refers to accumulated signs of status: say being fluent in formal English, owning a Lexus, or grinding your own coffee. This notion of cultural capital undoubtedly underlines the attack on 'PMCs'

hoarding cultural signifiers of virtue, whether or not adherents of the theory admit to this concession to culturalism. Yet in identifying cultural capital with class position, they imply an automatic relationship which doesn't necessarily exist. Academics, for example, are sharply divided on many political questions. In general middle, or mediating strata are divided over cultural, political and economic questions.

So, returning to the initial question, is there a middle class? Perhaps, to a point, we can accept the common sociological argument that there are many middle classes, or middle strata. There are small-business owners, managers in various industries, white-collar salary workers, self-employed contractors, union officials, those retired but owning housing assets – these are all different positions that could fit into the 'middle-class' box, but may have clashing interests and politics (e.g., whereas small-business owners have an interest in reducing tax, public sector workers have an interest in redistributive policies). The most you can say in general is that they do not straightforwardly fit into the binary of industrial worker and capitalist, but rather play various mediating roles.

Decline of 'middle class'

Although many popular talking points about class are misleading, the widespread talking point of the 'decline of the middle class' has more truth to it. Young adults across the Anglosphere are less likely to own homes than their parents,¹⁹ face a more insecure labour market,²⁰ and are more saddled with debt.²¹ In short, even many from relatively privileged backgrounds are downwardly mobile.

In their work "Death of the Yuppie Dream", Barbara and John Ehrenreich place this 'decline of the middle class' in the context of a capitalist offensive beginning in the 1970s. Ehrenreich notes that alongside the gutting of working-class power that even undermined the position of many PMCs, there was also a cultural offensive against the 'liberal professions' such as academia (the inverse of Liu's argument in *Virtue Hoarders* that PMCs were waging

13 Adkins, Lisa; Cooper, Melinda; Konings, Martijn. "Class in the 21st century: Asset inflation and the new logic of inequality." EPA: Economy and Space 0(0), pp. 1–25, 2019. Sage Publications.

14 Piketty, Thomas. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Harvard University Press. 2014.

15 Bell, Miriam. "NZ number two in international house price growth ranks." Stuff, 4 Jun 2021 ([tinyurl.com/nz-no2](https://www.stuff.co.nz/economy/property/123456789)).

16 Bryan, Dick; Rafferty, Mike. *Risking together: How finance is dominating everyday life in Australia*. Sydney University Press. 2018.

17 Peet, Richard. "Contradictions of Finance Capitalism." *Monthly Review*, 1 Dec 2011 ([tinyurl.com/mr-finance](https://www.monthlyreview.org/12-01-11/peet.htm)).

18 Bourdieu; *ibid*.

19 Nova, Annie. "Here's why millions of millennials are not homeowners", CNBC, 30 Aug 2019 ([tinyurl.com/millennials-usa](https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/30/millennials-not-homeowners.html)); Stats NZ. "Homeownership rate lowest in almost 70 years", Stats NZ, 8 Dec 2020 ([tinyurl.com/millennials-nz](https://www.stats.govt.nz/info/2020/12/08/homeownership-rate-lowest-in-almost-70-years)); Savage, Michael. "Millennial housing crisis engulfs Britain", *The Guardian*, 28 Apr 2018 ([tinyurl.com/millennials-uk](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/28/millennial-housing-crisis-engulfs-britain)); Chau, David. "House ownership is out of reach for 'disenfranchised' millennials, says CoreLogic property analysts", ABC News, 28 Sep 2019 ([tinyurl.com/millennials-aus](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-28/millennials-house-ownership-out-of-reach/11555556)).

20 Martinchek, Cassandra. "Young Millennials and Gen Zers Face Employment Insecurity and Hardship during the Pandemic", Urban Institute. 18 Dec 2020 ([tinyurl.com/yz-insecurity](https://www.urbaninstitute.org/publications/young-millennials-and-gen-zers-face-employment-insecurity-and-hardship-during-the-pandemic)).

21 DeMatteo, Megan. "How Much Debt Do Millennials Have?", CNBC, 19 Mar ([tinyurl.com/millennial-debt](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/19/how-much-debt-do-millennials-have.html)).

a cultural offensive against workers on behalf of capital). Following outsourcing of industrial labour, information technology increasingly facilitated outsourcing and automation of white-collar labour. Conditions in tertiary education were undermined. All of this was exacerbated, of course, by the global financial crisis. The Ehrenreichs argues this undermining of the PMC may be a basis for radicalisation:

In the coming years, we expect to see the remnants of the PMC increasingly making common cause with the remnants of the traditional working class for, at a minimum, representation in the political process. This is the project that the Occupy movement initiated and spread, for a time anyway, worldwide.²²

Yet in *Virtue Hoarders*, despite drawing on the Ehrenreichs' concept of the Professional-Managerial Class, Liu is dismissive of their thesis regarding the decomposition and radicalisation of the PMC, largely justifying this dismissal on the basis of Occupy Wall Street's failure. However, for all the limitations of Sanders' and Corbyn's politics, downward mobility is central to the revival of socialism among young people that has made these previously obscure backbenchers household names. Liu's positioning of herself as an honourable exception to the PMC rule precludes an analysis of this shift in class composition and subjectivity.

Any revolution will not be a purely proletarian affair; it will not be solely and clearly be a conflict between Capitalism and the Working Class. A revolution is a swirling grey affair, populated with clashing strata from all across the framework of society... At that ^[SEP] point when the heat is on, we can't be spending our time educating our newfound allies, we need to have done the work beforehand, it is too late to be trying to collect our hand when the hand needs to be played.²³

The aim of a principled socialist critique of class society is not to moralise, but to transform. Sectarians attacking comrades on the basis that they are 'petite bourgeois', or the contemporary variant of PMCs trolling other PMCs on Twitter, are forms of point-scoring that do nothing to advance the cause of social transformation. Clearly there are middle strata in class society, with a greater degree of relative privilege than the most oppressed sections of the working-class. However, many can be organised, on the basis of a common programme encompassing the interests of all oppressed and exploited people. Past revolutions and social movements show that a section of the middle strata will join the right side of history, and the question must always be posed: which side are you on?

Conclusion: Political transformation over moralism

In Marxist Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács disputes the notion that revolution would be 'purely proletarian.' By necessity, any mass social transformation must draw in various sectors, including middle strata. Moreover, this will not happen automatically, rather it requires the organisation of middle strata in the meantime:

22 Ehrenreich, Barbara & John. "Death of a Yuppie Dream", Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Feb 2013 (tinyurl.com/pmc-decline).

23 Lukács, Georg. 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organisation' in *History and Class Consciousness*. Merlin Press. 1967

“Working-class millionaires”: the housing bubble, inequality, and NIMBYism

By DAPHNE LAWLESS

In my article on the Auckland local body elections in 2016, I paid special attention to (now former) Auckland Councillor Mike Lee – a long-standing Left-wing activist who had distinguished himself by opposing intensified housing in the central city/inner suburbs area which he represented.²⁴ Although the debate has moved on in Auckland, it is currently raging in full force in Wellington. Some of the strongest voices against similar housing intensification in that city – whose rate of rent inflation now outpaces Auckland's²⁵ – are councillors elected from the Green Party.

“Now I don’t know why progressives like that have a mind block. I just don’t know,” commented urban geographer Ben Ross to the *Newsroom* website.²⁶

This article aims to provide an answer to Ben Ross’s question; one which uses the much-misunderstood idea of *class* – in the sense of the social analysis pioneered by Karl Marx – to suggest an explanation for “Not In My Back Yard” (NIMBY) attitudes among the self-described Left. On the way, I hope to show how a class analysis makes it easier to understand why the massive inflation in housing prices and rents has been allowed to happen in the first place.

Whatever happened to class?

It’s very difficult to talk about “class” sensibly, since the uses of the term which are current in popular

culture and the mass media are very difficult from the sense in which Marx used it. The popular understanding of the media is that “working-class” is a *cultural* identity – or a “consumption” identity – meaning someone who consumes “ordinary”, mass-market things, rather than fancy “elite” things. In New Zealand terms, someone who drinks Lion Red beer and watches rugby, rather than drinks Cloudy Bay wine and goes to dance recitals, might be called “working class”.

This idea of class – based on what people *consume* – is very popular among Right-wing populists who want to build a mass movement against media and cultural “elites”, rather than the capitalist system and the billionaire class. The crowning stupidity of this approach came from the US presidential spokesperson who tried to argue that the “working class” identified with Donald Trump – at the time the most powerful head of state on the globe and infamous for flaunting his wealth – because he ate Big Macs.²⁷

In contrast, when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels discussed class, they specifically meant *a social distinction based on ownership of the means of production, and on control over others’ labour power*. Marx and Engels’ vision, as expressed in the *Communist Manifesto*, was of society increasingly divided between two major classes – owners of the means of production (capitalists) and those who needed to work to survive (proletarians).²⁸

24 <https://fightback.org.nz/2016/10/19/aucklands-no-choice-elections-blue-greens-and-conservative-leftists/>

25 <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/auckland-rents-up-nearly-3-per-cent-new-barfoot-thompson-data/>

26 <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/the-lefties-who-want-less-housing>

27 <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/375422-gorka-americans-like-trump-because-he-eats-big-macs-on-air>

28 See elsewhere in this issue for discussions of modern developments in class analysis which look in more detail at the various social groups which are “in-between” these two major layers.

So why do Marx, Engels and socialists in their tradition worry so much about the idea of (socioeconomic) class? Because class is a kind of “dirty secret” of capitalism and liberal democracy. On paper, in a society such as Aotearoa or Australia, everyone is equal; we all have the vote and the same human rights. But in practice, the owners of property make sure – through their influence over the economy, over the lives of their employees and tenants, and with their ownership of mass media and dominance of educational institutions – that democracy can never develop to the point that it threatens their privileges. As French poet Anatole France put it: “The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.”

Class, then, is why democracy under capitalism never works “as advertised”. But class analysis is not a conspiracy theory. It is not as if all the members of property-owning classes consciously “rig” the system to benefit at everyone else’s expense. Marx argues that *the ideas in people’s heads develop from the way in which they live their lives*:

The mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.²⁹

Privileged classes and groups are not (entirely) consciously and selfishly guarding their privileges; but it just seems like “common sense” that a way of organizing society which makes their lives comfortable and pleasant is the correct state of affairs. This is why “rational” arguments for social change, or appeals to people’s better nature, have limited impact on the privileged. But even worse, these ideas “trickle down” to dominate all social layers, even the most oppressed:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.³⁰

The common sense of gentrification millionaires

So how does all this help us understand the “progressive mind-block” where veteran socialists and Green Party activists end up opposing housing

intensification? In my 2016 article I suggested some explanation of how Mike Lee, in particular, ended up in that position:

Mike Lee’s main achievements for the Left were as chair of the Auckland Regional Council, when he was elected by all the people of the old Auckland City, from Avondale to Remuera to Otahuhu. His anti-Unitary Plan stance, however, has been as the councillor for the Waitemata/Gulf ward – including the central city but dominated by the gentrified, super-wealthy suburbs of Ponsonby, Grey Lynn, Herne Bay et al... One does not need to be a Marxist to point out that a good elected politician promotes the interests of their constituents.

Similarly, in Dileep Fonseka’s *Newsroom* article, he mentions how pro-intensification Wellington councillor Rebecca Matthews “inadvertently highlighted Green Party-aligned Deputy Mayor Sarah Free’s ownership of multiple properties when she captured a screenshot of declared property interests”.

“There is a generational thing here,” Matthews told Fonseka. “I’ve met maybe one person under 35 who is against this stuff....people have got in this position because they managed to buy these houses cheaply many, many years ago.” This is a point which I also raised in my 2016 article, when I pointed out that Mike Lee’s constituency

were *beneficiaries of racially-biased gentrification*. Grey Lynn and Ponsonby were heavily Polynesian working-class suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s. They were pushed out of the area in the 1980s... and young, “hipster”, Pākehā took advantage to buy up cheaper housing in what were then insalubrious but culturally rich suburbs. This generation subsequently benefitted from the massive neoliberal housing boom. They may have “done up” their Ponsonby villas, but no amount of “doing up” can justify a 2000% increase in capital value over 30 years.

It’s worth mentioning that there are far more extreme opponents of contemporary urbanism than Mike Lee or the Wellington Green Party. The most notorious are a small group in Auckland led by café owner Lisa Prager, who have gone beyond opposition to intensification to active sabotage against bike lanes and traffic-calming initiatives in the inner suburbs. Prager and her group, however, go well beyond the concerns about “heritage” and the greed of property developers raised by the councillors:

29 Karl Marx, “Preface” in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>

30 Karl Marx, “The Illusion of the Epoch” in *The German Ideology*: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm>

Prager believes transport and roading changes being made by AT are “designed to assist multinational corporations to transfer public money into private hands via confidential contracts”.

Alternative transport lobby groups like Bike Auckland and Generation Zero along with blogs like Greater Auckland were a part of a global conspiracy called Agenda 21, she said³¹

For those who have followed *Fightback*'s analysis of the far right, this is the familiar form of conspiracy theories that we hear from far-Right groups opposing COVID health measures or multicultural society in general. It's worth noting that even mainstream “NIMBY” discourse resorts to milder forms of ‘alternative facts’, such as accusing pro-intensification activists of being fronts for the Property Council (as Mike Lee does in his response in Fonseka's article), or claiming that there are tens of thousands of “ghost homes” sitting vacant so there is no need for new housing.³²

Prager's group, although far more extreme than the NIMBY councillors, fit the same class profile we've been discussing: small property/business owners; Pākehā; of the generation which came of age before neoliberal reforms and the property bubble. In a 2019 article about anti-transgender/anti-sex work attitudes from some on the Left, I suggested that:

fascist politics everywhere can be characterised as a movement led by the insecure and frightened middle-class. People who may have worked hard to build a little privilege for themselves under capitalism become terrified that an ethnic or cultural Other (classically, “the Jews”) might take it away from them.³³

NIMBYism – as a defence of a status quo which benefits a particular middle-class layer, couched in the language of social justice, and envisaging a conspiracy of big business and progressive activists against it – is a classic example of a Right-wing populist argument which disguises itself in Left-sounding language, effectively enough to confuse those who identify as “Left” but feel their privilege to be threatened by social trends. In other words, the kind of thing which *Fightback* has been warning against for many years.

The wealth effect builds a constituency

However, if the problem with house-price inflation and NIMBYism were due only to the economic self-interest – or “mind blocks” – of local body politicians and grumpy shopkeepers, it would be much easier to solve. The knottier problem is one at the level of the entire economy – and baked into the neoliberal economic model which has ruled the global economy for the last four decades.

A capitalist economy always runs a balancing act between keeping wages as low as possible, and therefore profits high; and the problem that profits can only be made if the goods and services produced can be sold. And if wages are too low, workers can't afford to buy things.

One possible answer to this problem is expressed in the mantra of New Zealand's neoliberal politicians in the 1990s of an “export-led recovery”. You can keep wages low in your own country if the goods and services are sold overseas – a model which has shown its most impressive success in China and other East Asian economies. But the benefits of this model decrease as more countries adopt it, in a kind of “race to the bottom”.

Runaway inflation in the property market of New Zealand, and other countries, suggests another way out from the contradiction between wages and consumption – what economists call *the household wealth effect*.³⁴ Encouraged by near-zero interest rates, a continuous rise in the value of people's homes means, bluntly, that people “feel richer”. Jacinda Ardern's government has acknowledged that people “expect” there to be continuous rises in property values – an endorsement of a permanently inflating asset market which no Government would ever make for, say, the stock market.³⁵

Given this implicit Government guarantee, there is no reason for people who own housing property not to run up ever increasing amounts of debt – “putting it on the mortgage”. But this maintains consumption levels, and thus keeps the economy ticking over, at the price of increasing social inequality. Those who have property get continuously richer – those who can't get on the property ladder pay rent at an ever-

31 <https://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/local-news/central-leader/102298217/anticycleway-protester-arrested-after-destroying-traffic-island-with-sledgehammer>; see also this tweet from Auckland Councillor Pippa Coom <https://mobile.twitter.com/pippacoom/status/1410540515653685249>

32 <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/industries/125463204/ghost-houses-a-spectre-of-nzs-housing-crisis-or-just-a-bogeyman>

33 <https://fightback.org.nz/2019/08/26/swarf-and-terf-the-red-brown-alliance-in-policing-gender/>

34 <https://www.rbnz.govt.nz/research-and-publications/discussion-papers/2019/dp2019-01>

35 <https://www.interest.co.nz/property/108301/pm-jacinda-ardern-says-sustained-moderation-remains-governments-goal-when-it-comes>

increasing proportion of income. This is what they call a “K-shaped recovery” – recovery for property owners, stagnation or worse for the rest of us.³⁶

Some Leftists object to housing property being used as the key to a class analysis. Someone’s personal house, they argue, is not a “means of production” in the same way that Marx meant it. But in the current financialized neoliberal economy, as we’ve seen, a house is not only a place to live but an investment asset, which not only inflates spending power above what wages and salaries could provide, but continually *exacerbates* the distinction between the “haves” and the “have-nots”.³⁷ In Australia, income inequality between the highest and lowest deciles nearly doubled once housing costs are accounted for.³⁸

Ben Ross’s perplexity at the “mind-block” of progressive NIMBYs is resolved when we recognize that such people are only “progressive” insofar as it doesn’t impact upon their own social status and comfort. An economy where house prices were stable, or fell, would be disastrous for the comfortably-off older Pākehā layers from which our local politicians are overwhelmingly drawn – no matter how they justify it (to themselves and others) with concerns about heritage or conspiracy theories. Worse still, it would no doubt lead to an economic crisis with a collapse in consumption – unless balanced by a large increase in wages and salaries, which is the last thing that big business wants.

The housing asset bubble *will* end – one way or another. Auckland’s formerly runaway rents have begun to “flatten off” with increased building since 2016, though property prices continue to inflate³⁹. Either the era of near-zero interest rates will come to an end due to adverse economic developments elsewhere in the world; or the misery imposed by increasing rents for unhealthy and unsustainable housing will reach a tipping point where the self-interest of the NIMBY classes will be overruled. The question is how much pain working people have to suffer before that happens. The suggestion of former Green Party leader Metiria Turei in 2016 of crashing the housing market by 40% is an excellent one, that might be accomplished through massive intensification of sustainable housing, accompanied by a programme of rent control, coupled with a big increase in wages and salaries, and reforms of National Superannuation and KiwiSaver to offer alternative forms of economic security to property ownership. Only then might the stranglehold of the landlord class over politics in this country be loosened.



36 <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/money/2021/04/explosion-of-wealth-inequality-as-housing-boom-leaves-many-behind-economist.html>

37 <https://voxeu.org/article/housing-and-wealth-inequality-story-policy-trade-offs>

38 <https://theconversation.com/how-the-housing-boom-has-driven-rising-inequality-102581>

39 <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/125543691/rents-flatten-after-government-housing-changes-trade-me>

The wealthy backers of the Alt-right

By BYRON CLARK

The growth of right-wing populism in the mid-2010s has frequently been misconstrued as a working-class phenomenon (or at least, a “white working class” phenomenon). Donald Trump’s supporters in the US however were wealthier than the average American voter and analysis of the Brexit vote in the UK found no real correlation between being part of the working class and voting to leave the European Union.

Of course, a successful populist movement can’t exist without recruiting working class supporters. The alt-right tells (predominantly young) white men who have been shut out from achieving the economic security that comes careers and home ownership, that the cause of their predicament is not neoliberalism or the steady reduction in the power of organised labour over the past decades, but feminists, liberal elites, socialists or- in its mostly openly racist forms- a cabal of Jewish bankers or billionaires.

This narrative, a kind of reactionary identity politics based on white male identity, has only been possible due to the financial backing of wealthy individuals, who have provided the capital for right-wing ‘news’ websites, speaking tours and pseudo-academic journals.

Steve Bannon and the alternative right

Before he was an adviser to Donald Trump or the CEO of *Breitbart News* (which he described as “a platform for the alt-right”) Steve Bannon was a film producer. Before producing a number of right-leaning documentaries, he was credited as the executive producer of the 1991 Sean Penn film *The Indian Runner* and later of the 1999 Shakespeare adaptation *Titus*.

Bannon’s goal in Hollywood however was not to be a producer, but a screenwriter. But his scripts were “too bizarre, hyper-masculine, and apocalyptic even for Hollywood”, at least according to Dale Beran’s 2019 book *It Came From Something Awful: How a Toxic Troll Army Accidentally Memed Donald Trump into Office*. Beran writes that one of Bannon’s key

intellectual influences is the 20th century Italian philosopher Julius Evola.

Evola has been described as “one of the most influential fascist racists in Italian history” by historian Aaron Gillette. The core of his philosophy is that man’s primordial warrior spirit, the supposed foundational pillar of civilization, is being debased by modern effeminate culture. Bannon was a screenwriter in the mould of Julius Evola.

While Hollywood studios may not have seen Bannon’s scripts as potential money makers, the political documentaries he went on to produce attracted funding from Robert Mercer. Back in the 1970s, Mercer had worked on machine-learning artificial intelligence to process vast sets of data with the goal of predicting the movement of markets. These algorithms have resulted in the hedge fund for which he worked, Renaissance Technologies, earning a yield of 70 percent each year, and have made Mercer one of the world’s richest men.

Although Mercer, a libertarian, had initially preferred the platform of Ted Cruz, Bannon convinced him to back Donald Trump in the 2016 US election. Via his production company, Glittering Steel, Bannon channelled funding from Mercer to *Breitbart*, and other endeavours, such as the college campus tour of right-wing provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos. One of the most successful projects was Cambridge Analytica, a data analytics company founded in 2013 with Bannon as CEO and Mercer and his daughter Rebekah as principal investors. Cambridge Analytica is today best known for fraudulently siphoning personal information from 87 million Facebook users using a quiz app in order to build elaborate personality profiles with the aim of manipulating voters, both in the 2016 US presidential election, and during the Brexit vote in the UK.

Julius Evola’s ideas also appealed to the denizens of online spaces like 4chan where young and economically marginalised men would gather. These young men, often self-identifying as “NEETs” a term used by British statisticians meaning not in employment, education or training, had given up on achieving the traditional markers of success and retreated into what Dale Beran called “screen based

fantasy words". It was not the first reactionary movement to emerge out of 4chan, "Gamergate" a campaign of harassment targeting women who worked in the game industry (Zoe Quinn in particular) and a feminist video game reviewer emerged from these young men. Beran writes:

Evola's texts read like a potpourri of the heroes, mysticism, and adventure that are mashed into comic books, unsold Bannon screenplays, and PlayStation 4 games in which gods from Asia battle trolls from Norway for ancient scrolls devised by Christian demons guarded by Greek centaurs.

It's easy to see why Evola appealed to gamergaters. Gamers spend their lives absorbing fantasy stories of unfettered masculine heroes wandering the earth wild and free. And it seems only natural that they eventually regard their romanticized escapism as what all that Hollywood art works so hard to convince its audience it is—a lost ideal that must have been very real in a vanished past.

Milo Yiannopoulos, a former tech blogger now working with Bannon, wrote numerous pro-gamergate articles for *Breitbart*—while the mainstream games press was scathing and the media outside the subculture struggled to make sense of it. Yiannopoulos had found his audience, disenfranchised young men susceptible to the message that they were the real oppressed group in the modern world, denied their rightful place in society by "social justice warriors" and what Evola had termed "the feminine aegis".

With this new found audience, Yiannopoulos soon embarked on his "dangerous faggot" tour of American university campuses, speaking on topics such as how "feminism is cancer" a phrase taken from a 4chan meme. While the men Yiannopoulos spoke to may have been economically marginalised (though certainly not in all cases) the tour itself was only possible with the money from Robert Mercer.

Yiannopoulos exit from public life was swift, in February 2017 when video of him making comments appearing to justify sexual acts between men and boys emerged. The Conservative Political Action Conference rescinded their invitation for him to speak, and a book deal with publisher Simon & Schuster was cancelled. Bannon's employment at the White House ended a few months later following the Unite the Right rally in Virginia where a counter protester was killed. Bannon had reportedly been behind Trump's comments condemning violence on 'many sides'.

Guo Wengui's fake news empire

While Yiannopoulos remains *persona non grata*, Bannon has continued to influence politics through alliances with wealthy donors. In October 2017, just weeks from his departure from the White House, he met with exiled Chinese billionaire businessman Guo Wengui (also known as Miles). Guo reportedly gave a \$150,000 loan to Bannon and in August 2018 a Guo-linked company entered into a \$1 million consulting contract with him. In early 2020, the pair raised several millions of dollars in a private offering for a company called GTV Media Group.

Earlier this year Graphica Research released a report that describes Guo as being "at the centre of a vast network of interrelated media entities which have disseminated online disinformation and promoted real-world harassment campaigns."⁴⁰ His media network, which includes GTV, has spread Qanon conspiracy narratives and misinformation about the Covid-19 virus. GTV has become so synonymous with fake news that if someone shares a link to it on Facebook, it's automatically removed.

In the declaration of the New Federal State of China, a lobby group launched by Guo and Bannon with the stated aim of overthrowing the Communist Party of China, another organisation was launched, the Himalaya Supervisory Organization. According to that document:

[T]he Himalaya Supervisory Organization will make all preparations for the formation of the New Federal State of China with outreach efforts. It will actively liaise with various countries, political parties, associations and international friends supporting the establishment of the New Federal State of China and coordinate relationships with the interim government. It will guide and assist the preparation of the new government, and ensure the smooth, effective, and steady progress of the preparation of the New Federal State of China.

Aotearoa has not been outside the reach of this new group; the local branch operates as Himalaya New Zealand. According to their website:

Our mission is to raise awareness of [the] truth disclosed by the Whistle-blower movement initiated by Mr Miles Guo and the former White House strategist Mr Steve K. Bannon. We aim to counter false narratives forced through left-leaning mainstream media and compromised key NGOs within New Zealand.

40 https://public-assets.graphika.com/reports/graphika_report_ants_in_a_web.pdf

When Bannon interviewed former National Party MP and later co-leader of Advance New Zealand Jami-Lee Ross on his FTV show *War Room*, Ross was flanked by the New Zealand flag and the Flag of the New Federal State of China. GTV is also the platform of choice for *Counterspin Media*, a New Zealand produced talk show promoting conspiracy theories and far-right talking points.

The show is hosted by Kelvyn Alp. Alp has a colourful history on the fringes of New Zealand politics. After serving in the army in the 1990s he started an anti-government militia that was covered in a 2002 episode of *20/20*. A synopsis describes the segment as being about “a disaffected former soldier who claims he has his own army and is prepared to go into battle with the Government.” Like Ross in his *War Room* interview, Alp appears on camera between the flags of New Zealand and the New Federal State of China.

Tex Hill, a representative of Himalaya New Zealand, appears as a guest on the first episode of *Counterspin*, and Alp revealed on another GTV show (*The Fringe*) that Hill provided the studio. While Guo has ample wealth to invest in his media venture, investments have also been made by his supporters in New Zealand – or at least, supporters have attempted to send money to Guo. In July 2020 the *New Zealand Herald* reported that a group of investors had \$3 million blocked by New Zealand banks. A week prior the *Wall St Journal* had reported the FBI was examining Guo and the money used to fund his media efforts in the US.

Hill was among these investors and as reported by the *Herald* had successfully transferred \$100,000 to GTV Media Group via BNZ but was blocked from transferring a smaller amount via ANZ. It's unclear exactly what the financial relationship between *Counterspin Media* and GTV Media Group or Himalaya New Zealand is, though unlike rival conspiracy theorist broadcasters Billy Te Kahika and Vinny Eastwood, the show does not solicit donations from viewers.

Richard Spencer's benefactor

William H. Regnery II, the heir to a textile fortune who died earlier this year was rarely in the public eye, but his white supremacist views were no secret. In 2001 he founded the Charles Martel Society, named for the Frankish king who defeated a Muslim army at the Battle of Tours in 732. The society produces *The Occidental Quarterly*. Fearing white people were in danger of extinction, he announced plans in 2004 to start a whites only

dating site. While the site never eventuated, the fear remained. He proclaimed in a 2006 speech: “The white race may go from master of the universe to an anthropological curiosity.”

As the Charles Martel Society is a space for extremists to share their writings with other extremists (essays in the *Occidental Quarterly* have titles such as “Reflections on Some Aspects of Jewish Self-Deception.”) Regnery started the National Policy Institute in 2005 with the aim of injecting white-supremacist ideas into more mainstream political conversations, spending \$380,000 to do so. He hired the alt-right figure Richard Spencer in 2011.

Donald Trump's presidential campaign, calling for immigration restrictions and other policies long advocated by the institute, energised the far-right. It was at a National Policy Institute conference following Trump's victory where Spencer famously proclaimed: “Hail Trump!, Hail our people!, Hail Victory!”, eliciting Nazi style salutes from members of the audience. Less widely reported on were Regnery's comments: “I never thought in my life I would experience an event such as this, and I am now persuaded that with your courage the alt-right side of history will prevail.”

In 2017 *Buzzfeed News* quoted Regnery as saying “My support has produced a much greater bang for the buck than by the brothers Koch or Soros Inc.”⁴¹

The old money funding race-science

While eugenics and race-science have since been widely discredited, these ideas were mainstream in the scientific establishment for close to two centuries, only falling out of favour following the atrocities of the Holocaust. Occasionally these ideas again penetrate mainstream thinking, such with the popularity of the 1994 book *The Bell Curve*, by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, which claimed that certain non-white racial groups have inherently lower intelligence, or more recently with the now removed YouTube channel of Stefan Molyneux, who promoted the same idea as an argument against immigration to predominantly white countries.

With mainstream scientific journals no longer publishing their work by the mid-20th century, several like-minded researchers including former Nazi scientist Otmar von Verschuer and British eugenicist Roger Pearson, established their own journal, *Mankind Quarterly*, in 1960. According to Angela Saini's 2019 book *Superior: The Return of*

41 <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/aramroston/hes-spent-almost-20-years-funding-the-racist-right-it>

Race Science, “Their aims were simple: to challenge what they saw as a politically correct, left-wing conspiracy around race and bring back some scientific objectivity.”

The financial backing for *Mankind Quarterly* came from a reclusive multimillionaire whose wealth had its roots in plantation slavery. Described by Saini as “a diehard segregationist”, Wickliffe Draper was descended from the largest slaveholder in the state of Kentucky. In 1959 Draper set up the International Association for the Advancement of Ethnology and Eugenics, to produce and publish documents on race.

In his 2002 book *The Funding of Scientific Racism*, William Tucker described the association as “probably the most significant coterie of fascist intellectuals in the post-war United States and perhaps in the entire history of the country.”

Cash gifts were routinely made via Drapers Pioneer Fund, a private foundation whose purpose was to disseminate information on human heredity and eugenics, to scientists who echoed Draper’s political sentiments, while thousands of copies of *Mankind Quarterly* containing their work were sent out to a list of American political conservatives. Draper died in 1972, but his legacy continues, with *Mankind Quarterly* still published today.



Book Review

Dialectics of Revolution: Hegel, Marxism, and its critics through a lens of race, class, gender, and colonialism by Kevin B. Anderson (Daraja Press, 2020): reviewed by VICTOR OSPREY

What is Marxism? Is it a philosophy, a science – or both? What distinguishes science from philosophy, and is it a distinction as easy to determine as we might imagine? After all – what even is science? And what does dialectical reason, or indeed philosophy in general have to offer when it comes not only to understanding but to changing society?

Kevin Anderson, a long-time scholar-activist and Professor of Sociology at the University of California, has set himself exactly this task in the latest book, *Dialectics of Revolution*. Taking the form of a collection of essays, Anderson examines Marx, Engels, Lenin and Bukharin – and especially Hegel – in considerable detail, alongside the ‘Western’ Marxists Herbert Marcuse and Georg Lukács. Coming from his distinctive Marxist-Humanist perspective, drawing upon the work of Russian-American Marxist Raya Dunayevskaya, Anderson provides a substantive explication and defence of dialectical reason throughout and in dialogue with its critics.

This red thread serves as a launching pad for the topics examined in the essay. These range from Lenin’s encounter with Hegel, to Lukács 1948 work *The Young Hegel*, the relationship of critical theorists like Marcuse to Hegel, and other related subjects.

Underlying the whole text is a proposition as to what Marxist (or what Anderson may prefer to call Marx’s) philosophy can give philosophically and politically to struggles around race, class, gender, and colonialism. In other words, the unity of theory and practice – praxis.

Science as compass, philosophy as guide?

The interrelationship between science and philosophy goes back thousands of years, with each interpenetrating and influencing the other in conceiving reality, social processes, and the natural world.

The separation of science from philosophy into strictly delineated fields is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of the intellectual life of humanity.

When it comes to socialist theory, the extent to which it is a ‘science’ has long bedevilled the movement. One approach has been to attempt to mirror the hypothetical-deductive model approach of the natural sciences, as if Marxism were a branch of chemistry. Another approach rejects this positivist tendency, instead pushing Marxism’s merits as a philosophy and an ideology in itself. For example, the insights derived from dialectical and historical materialism and indeed the critique of political economy, without attempting to prove it is an exact science that could be replicated in a lab like other fields of knowledge.

The former, and similar currents in the social sciences attempts to prove that their methodology is on par with physics, and believe this necessary to be taken seriously as a ‘science’ in the sense of being a lookalike of physics. However, it is perfectly acceptable for science simply to be a field of study; the difference between chemistry and Marxism is that humans cannot change the laws of chemistry or biology, only make use of them as far as they are understood. Whereas societal formations and social relationships are human made, and thus their laws can be changed, which is where Marxism as a social science has genuine insights in comprehending and transforming such social structures.

Marx and Engels, deeply influenced by the natural sciences of their time for all that they were dialecticians and dialectical thinkers anchored in German philosophy, relied on now partly outdated science as a metaphor and stimulant to their theoretical conception of mutually interacting and excluding agents. Taking Engels as an example, he toyed with rapid developments in chemistry ‘to get a better understanding of interacting and mutually determining systems. In other words, abstract dialectics could be seen in the metaphorical mirror of chemistry.’⁴²

42 Kircz, J 2014, ‘Elements of an essay on human change’, in R. Farris (ed.) *Returns of Marxism: Marxist Theory in a Time of Crisis*, IIRE, Amsterdam, p. 187.

As author Joost Kircz notes, attempting to prove whether nature is or is not dialectical according to human-made models (Hegelian or not) may be an intriguing intellectual exercise; what is more important however is how it spurred creative thinking around the concepts of mutually interrelated and determining systems, and how they could be extrapolated further and built upon. Whether applied to the natural sciences or, perhaps more appropriately, the social structures investigated by the social sciences.

Evolutionary biology is one example of a crude scientific materialism that, while superficially super-scientific, is an abstract materialism, largely excluding history and its processes – in other words, a non-historical, non-dialectical materialism. As Kevin Anderson notes: 'Sociobiology/evolutionary biology denies historical materialism's notion that human consciousness grows and develops through history, which is a product of the self-creation of human beings.'⁴³ It has also regularly been used as a 'scientific' justification for predetermined racist conclusions.

Marx's debt to Hegel, and to 'German', 'philosophical' critical science precisely comes in handy in teasing out the limitations of the 'hard', positive sciences, without simply rejecting them. French Marxist Daniel Bensaïd summed up the contribution of positive sciences nicely: 'They are a necessary moment in the movement of knowledge – on condition that we not stop there.'⁴⁴ 'German science' forms part of an intellectual tradition which French rationalism and English empiricism have always rejected, despite themselves regularly falling into the trap of scientism; of taking the scientific conclusions of the moment for a permanently settled reality. Critique in the sense of Marx's approach instead undertakes to critique an established science and its underlying intellectual assumptions while critically assimilating its real insights – hence Marx's conception of his task as the critique of political economy.

Bensaïd further elaborated in an interview about the 'misinterpretation' of Marx as a scientist, in whose shadow was constructed a scientific, doctrinaire Marxism:

Marx points out the difference between what he calls "German science" and "English science". For him, English science means the exact or positive sciences. He is very admiring, sometimes excessively so, of the progress of physics, chemistry, geology... And then there is German science, *Wissenschaft*, which is not 'science' in the French sense of the term: it is the dynamic movement of knowledge. Very few people in France realised this. In particular, the early Althusser, the one of the 1960s, built his fame on a complex scientificity, on a wish for Marxism to be so scientific that Marxists could be recognised by their academic peers as serious people, and not as signatories of petitions, as intellectuals for hire. Hence the (unaccomplished!) search in Marx's work for an untraceable 'epistemological break': when did Marx become a scholar, instead of an ideologue and philosopher?⁴⁵

Louis Althusser, Marxist philosopher and long-time member of the French Communist Party sought as part of his effort to make Marxism more scientific to de-Hegelise Marx, to 'drive the shade of Hegel... back into the night.'⁴⁶ Althusser downplayed the extent of the continuity between Lenin's conception of the dialectic and Hegelian idealism – a difficult task, given the assertions made in more than 200 pages of notes and commentary Lenin wrote on Hegel in 1914-1915 (published as the *Philosophical Notebooks*).

Raya Dunayevskaya herself criticised making a fetish out of science: 'glorification of science is the mark not only of the ruling classes... but also of theoreticians busy revising Marxism... genuine historic revisions have always used "science" in the fight against "the Hegelian dialectic"... Eduard Bernstein was the first, back at the end of the 19th century; Louis Althusser is the latest but he is sure not to be the last since, of necessity, these proponents of "science" and opponents of "philosophy" are sure to keep reappearing...'⁴⁷

Although it may be said among certain sections of the ruling class these days the glorification of science no longer holds as much purchase as it once did, with these types preferring instead outright mysticism and submerging into wells of conspiracy theory.

43 Anderson, K 2020, *Dialectics of Revolution: Hegel, Marxism, and its critics through a lens of race, class, gender and colonialism*, Daraja Press, Ottawa, p. 157.

44 Bensaïd, D 2009, *Marx For Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique*, Verso Books, London, p. 207

45 International Institute for Research and Education 2021, 'What it means to be Marxist' (2007), https://iire.org/node/965?fbclid=IwAR-2BeKiMEcy3txDUe72Ds-o3Gpj4bO_j0TjQmR0vUUZRRb-rc9gbnuSpqsU

46 Anderson, K 2020, *Dialectics of Revolution: Hegel, Marxism, and its critics through a lens of race, class, gender and colonialism*, Daraja Press, Ottawa, p. 115.

47 Dunayevskaya, R 2017, *Russia: From Proletarian Revolution to State-Capitalist Counter-Revolution: Selected Writings*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, p. 433

Nonetheless, there was value in Althusser's effort, despite its foundational flaws and unhelpful schemas (an artificial distinction of a break between young, humanist Marx and old, scientific Marx, and the attempt to excise Hegelianism like a leftover evolutionary tail).

Notably his understanding that 'unlike a science, an ideology does not provide us with adequate instruments of knowledge' and how ideology as a system of representations 'is distinguished from science in that in it the practico-social function is more important than the theoretical function (function as knowledge).'⁴⁸

Or as Norman Geras, a then-sympathetic critic of Althusser puts it in more nuanced fashion: 'The problematic of a science (or ideology) governs not merely the solutions it is capable of providing but the very problems it can pose and the form in which they must be posed.'⁴⁹

Despite his appreciation, Geras reserves significant criticisms for Althusser, stating that his account of science is idealist, and goes as far as to say Althusser's account of the relation between Marxist theory and politics is both 'theoretically incorrect and harmful.'⁵⁰

Moreover, if Althusser begins by stressing the universality of knowledge in its content, 'he ends by denying the historicity of its condition and processes of production', a point exactly like Kevin Anderson and Marxist-humanists of various shades would make.⁵¹

And to top it all off, in what is perhaps his severest critique, Geras elaborates how Althusser's concern to stress the scientificity of Marxism 'fails to provide an account of what distinguishes this particular science from the other sciences.'⁵²

In effect, the differences between Marxism, mathematics, the physical and natural sciences are submerged rather than highlighted, all so Althusser can assimilate the entry of Marxism into the hallowed halls of a high respected science.

The problem is, when cracks are identified in that carefully constructed, apparently scientific edifice,

the whole thing tends to come crashing down soon afterword; much like what happened after an initial wave of Althusserianism swept the world, then quickly receded in the wake of serious problems identified with Althusser's approach and account of things years later.

A more all-rounded and nuanced conception of the interrelationship between science, philosophy, and the distortion of Marxism by Stalinism and other factors into economic reductionism (to take one example) is provided by the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács.

Lukács details how this degeneration of Marxism was:

directly connected with the fact that the specialisation of knowledge led to the separation of the sciences from each other... the working class movement and its ideology adopted this division of labour, the independence of scientific disciplines from each other. Marx had defined the economic as the material foundation of a more total historical process.'⁵³

By the 20th century, the economic had become a more or less 'exact' individual science, and this was largely replicated in the workers' movement, including its Marxist component. Marx had seen the economic as one factor of social evolution, organically interconnected with other social causal determinants. Individualised sciences for Lukács, removed from their interdependence with other causal agents, 'easily slides into mere tactics', distorting the 'Marxist conception of the economic [into] mere industrial productivity.'⁵⁴

Thus, the turning of economics into an isolated science laid the methodological basis for its ability to be manipulated.

As a result, when the moment came, Stalin was able to first distort the meaning of the economic 'on the theoretical level, and this distortion then became an instrument for his brutal manipulation of socialist development. When Stalin distorted the economic as a specialised positivist science, when he detached it from any political connectedness, he could claim to be building socialism by exclusively

48 Geras, N 1983, 'Althusser's Marxism: An Assessment', in New Left Review (ed.) *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*, Verso Books, London, pp. 255-56.

49 *Ibid*, p. 244.

50 *Ibid*, p. 259.

51 *Ibid*, p. 264.

52 *Ibid*, p. 266.

53 Lukács, G 1968, *Democratisation Today and Tomorrow: Part II. The Pure Alternative: Stalinism or Socialist Democracy. 6. Stalin's Method*, marxists.org, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/democracy/ch06.htm>

54 *Ibid*.

concentrating on industrial growth while totally ignoring the question of socialist democracy.⁵⁵

This sat entirely at odds with Marx's notion that the economic is 'more than just technology, more than a specialised individual science, but one causal factor within a larger total social formation.'⁵⁶

The larger total social formation remains a major focus of Marxists today, influenced by a form of dialectical reason deeply indebted to Hegel's intellectual offerings.

The alternative of dialectical reason – and its critics

Dialectical reason as a mode of analysis and thinking has come under sustained assault for some time, with its popularity significantly declining in the last half century in the face of other ideas like positivism, pragmatism, poststructuralism and postmodernism.

Explaining and elaborating foundational Hegelian thinking is first necessary in order to understand the discussion and criticism that follows.

Hegel's classic example of the dialectical process is the master-slave dialectic.

Despite the inherent power imbalance, the master lacks something – the fulfilment of their need for acknowledgement. Being acknowledged by the slave is insufficient, as they are merely a thing to the master, and vice-versa. The twist is that while the slave works and the master receives the products of consumption, in their work the slave fashions and shapes material objects, becoming aware of their consciousness as objectively creating the fruits of their labour.

As author Stuart Jeffries explains:

Clearly, this connects with the Marxist notion of man as essentially a producer, one who defines himself or rises to self-consciousness, even personal fulfilment, through meaningful work. For the slave, Hegel thought, labour, even at the direction of a slave master, makes him realise he has a mind of his own and means that the situation is not stable; its tensions generate

a dialectical movement that leads to a higher synthesis. That synthesis leads to another dialectical tension, to another synthesis, and so on, at least in Hegel's conception of history. Forty years after Hegel set out this dialectical process, Marx argued that if the object produced through labour is owned by another (be that another slave-owner or a capitalist), the worker has lost his own objectified essence. Such is alienated labour.⁵⁷

For Hegel, history was the unfolding of these dialectical processes towards the self-knowledge of what he termed the Absolute Spirit.

One of the key propositions of Hegelianism is that all the phenomena of any one epoch – its law, philosophy, economy, polity – are 'merely the externalisations of one moment of the development of the Idea, i.e., of one internal spiritual principle which is the essence of those phenomena, manifesting itself in each and all of them...'⁵⁸

In other words, 'Hegel conceives every social totality... as having a unique spiritual principle to which all the diverse realities can be reduced, since each of them is only an expression of it.'⁵⁹

Hegel's dialectical conception of the social totality was profoundly idealist, while Marx's dialectic, by turning Hegel on his head, functioned as a materialist inversion of Hegel's dialectic. This gave it an interpretive power an idealist dialectic alone could never have, getting at the root of social phenomena and their historic emergence.

German Marxist and prominent member of the Frankfurt School Herbert Marcuse broke down the critical virtue of a materialist version of dialectical thought in the 1960 preface to his book, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*:

Dialectic thought... becomes negative in itself. Its function is to break down the self-assurance and self-contentment... to demonstrate that unfreedom is so much at the core of things that the development of their internal contradictions leads necessarily to qualitative change: the explosion and catastrophe of the established state of affairs.⁶⁰

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*

57 Jeffries, S 2016, *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School*, Verso Books, London, p. 143.

58 Geras, N 1983, 'Althusser's Marxism: An Assessment', in New Left Review (ed.) *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*, Verso Books, London, p. 249.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

60 Jeffries, S 2016, *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School*, Verso Books, London, p. 143.

Although Hegel's dialectic of negativity critiques the existing world on the basis of a 'principle of freedom' such freedom is 'relegated to the realm of pure thought, to the Absolute Idea' according to Marcuse.⁶¹

Expanding the boundaries of dialectical reason beyond the realm of ideas, and its role as a 'negative philosophy', i.e., the negative and critical stance towards the world as illustrated in German philosophy, was a task taken up by a wide range of Marxist and Marx-inclined figures in the 20th century – like Marcuse.

Ranging from activists and scholars to rank-and-filers in the socialist and workers' movement, theoreticians, and organic intellectuals in the Gramscian sense.

They faced up to the charge levelled at dialectics by pragmatist, postmodernist and post-structuralist camps positing that it was a totalising, false perspective incapable of conceptualising particularity and difference.

That is, dialectics did not have room for the perspectives of oppressed racial, ethnic and national minorities, or of women, because it can only grasp grand totalities like progress and capitalism, not special oppressions at the interstices of society.

On the contrary, the Czech Marxist Karel Kosík, an original philosopher of Marxist humanism in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, regarded dialectics as fundamentally 'the opposite of doctrinaire systematisation or romanticisation of routine ideas'; his concept of the pseudoconcrete serves a useful function in this regard.⁶²

For Kosík, the pseudoconcrete represents 'the collection of phenomena that crowd the everyday environment and the routine atmosphere of everyday life' i.e., the world of 'man's fetishized praxis (which is not identical with the revolutionary-critical praxis of mankind).'⁶³ The pseudoconcrete would include unsubtle totalities that crowd out differences and the ability to understand them, standing essentially at odds with revolutionary-critical praxis and communist potentialities.

Interestingly enough, the late 19th century founders of pragmatism first embraced and then broke with Hegel. Pragmatist William James called Hegel's

philosophy a form of 'vicious intellectualism', because Hegel sought truth through reason instead of the multiple truths of a relativistic worldview.⁶⁴

Perhaps this is a partial explanation for the hostility of the esteemed German jurist, political theorist, and prominent Nazi Carl Schmitt, who wrote that on the day Hitler came to power, 'Hegel, so to speak, died.'⁶⁵

Indeed, a contemporaneous review of Marcuse's book on Hegel noted how 'Hegel's philosophy was fundamentally rationalist, while the philosophy of national socialism is fundamentally irrationalist.'⁶⁶

Another review came from the US Communist Party orientated journal *Science & Society*. While highlighting the 'interesting argument' of Marcuse demonstrating the Hegelian component in Marx's philosophy, it came down on the side of positivism, declaring it scientific and therefore revolutionary.

If that latter approach represented a dead end, the pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, influenced by poststructuralism and sharing the postmodernist critique of totality, essences and dialectic, took it even further.

Rorty wished to uproot not just Marxist dialectics but the entire tradition of critical dialectical thinking from Plato onwards.

In the name of pragmatism, given no alternative to capitalism exists, Rorty concluded in 1992 that the only hope for getting the money to end intolerable inequalities is to facilitate the activities of those like Henry Ford – and Donald Trump.

Thus, the political-philosophical nadir of pragmatist philosophy was reached; acceptance and conciliation with the untrammelled existence of the likes of Donald Trump. Needless to say, it failed to reach even that low bar. A system facilitating such individuals, far from moderating inequalities, has only made them worse.

Poststructuralists proposed, instead of dialectical reason, a philosophy of difference, with the goal of, as Gilles Deleuze and Daniel Cohn-Bendit put it in 1986, a 'culture of dissensus', striving for 'a deepening of individual positions and a resingularisation of individuals and human groups. What folly to claim that everyone – immigrants,

61 Anderson, K 2020, *Dialectics of Revolution: Hegel, Marxism, and its critics through a lens of race, class, gender and colonialism*, Daraja Press, Ottawa, p. 101.

62 *Ibid*, p. 165-6.

63 *Ibid*, p. 166.

64 *Ibid*, p. 161.

65 *Ibid*, p. 97.

66 *Ibid*, p. 98.

feminists, rockers, regionalists, pacifists, ecologists, and hackers – should agree on a same vision of things!’⁶⁷

Kevin Anderson’s response is brief and effective: ‘How the various spheres of the left, even if taken seriously in each of their particular manifestations, could eventually come together with enough force to challenge the rule of capital is probably not advanced by such a formulation. It should also be noted that Cohn-Bendit and Deleuze conspicuously leave aside the labour movement from their list of movements...’⁶⁸

Long-time collaborators and communists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, influenced by postmodernism, took a more distinctive approach. Critiquing dialectics, they saw their project as being in sync with both Marx and Lenin while asserting ‘the postmodernist project must be nondialectical.’⁶⁹

They alleged that Hegel’s theory of contradiction subsumed difference ‘into totality and teleology’, and labelled all forms of the dialectic as part of the logic of modern domination.⁷⁰

Dialectics relegate, as they put it, ‘the multiplicity of difference to binary oppositions and its subsequent subsumption of these differences in a unitary order.’⁷¹

Hardt and Negri are referring specifically to the process in Hegel’s *Science of Logic* where identity is broken down into difference, with difference then subsequently subsumed by contradiction.

Reconciling the particular into the universal is a legitimate criticism of dialectical philosophy. Is it an inherently negative feature, or actually the basis to address and overcome the issues and oppressions poststructuralists and postmodernists identify?

The particular and the universal – race, class, gender, colonialism

Hegel’s notion of the concrete universal is undeniably related to Marx’s own views about universal emancipation.

Drawing upon Hegel, the pull of the universal upon the particular, steering it in the direction

of universal human emancipation is evident in Marx’s body of work, for all that he addressed the particular.

Particulars like race, ethnicity and nationalism, especially in relation to subjects like Ireland, Poland, and the United States during the Civil War.

He distinguished between more narrow forms of group consciousness and more emancipatory ones, as when he emphasised how Irish Fenian nationalists had a class politics that opposed all landlords, pointing to the possibility of class unity across ethnic and national lines.

Such writings ‘belie the notion that Marx’s conceptualisation of capitalist modernity constitutes a “totalising” grand narrative under which the particulars of race, ethnicity, and nation are subsumed.’⁷²

Or indeed gender, given Marx considered gender oppression a foundational form of social hierarchy and domination. Marx paid special attention to gender and family relations in non-Western societies like stateless Native American ones, perceiving elements of gender equality and women’s social power ‘far beyond the limited women’s rights of his time.’⁷³

The women’s rights of Marx’s time were themselves a focus of his, concerned as he was with the social conditions of life for women across varying class strata. This included middle and upper-class French women driven to suicide by parents or husbands.

One of the specific tasks Raya Dunayevskaya set herself was to reinterpret absolute idea as absolute negativity, ‘rather than as any kind of ultimate metaphysical rest in a closed totality.’⁷⁴

In other words, a reinterpreted dialectic that didn’t emphasise totality to the exclusion of difference and identity.

This enabled the dialectic to connect to the rich variety of progressive movements for change – the emerging LGBTI+ movement, women, ethnic and national minorities, without giving up on a universal drive towards emancipation in its most absolute and complete form.

67 *Ibid*, p. 159.

68 *Ibid*, p. 160.

69 *Ibid*, p. 160.

70 *Ibid*, p. 160.

71 *Ibid*, p. 160.

72 *Ibid*, p. 186.

73 *Ibid*, p. 222.

74 *Ibid*, p. 168.

Through the dialectical vision of a new society as a unifying point, free of the domination of capital and its value form alongside racism, sexism, and other oppressions, Dunayevskaya 'avoids the pseudoconcrete that envelops so many of the postmodern philosophies of difference.'⁷⁵

If dialectical thinking seeks to stay relevant, it must not seal itself away from questions of difference, otherwise it would atrophy into a fetishized 'classical' perspective, instead of remaining a living, critical philosophy in the present.

Moreover, dialectical reason can critically assimilate genuine insights from poststructuralism and postmodernism without ceasing to be dialectical reason. If it didn't, it would cease to be a critical science.

Criticism

Kevin Anderson's book is well deserving of a wide readership and audience, given the clarity with which it explicates and summarizes key ideas, debates, and the histories it engages.

In terms of criticisms, there is slight repetition in the text, understandable due to it being a compilation of essays thematically if not chronologically linked. Some of the repetition is not entirely unwelcome, as it reinforces points made earlier and then provides greater detail.

A background in Hegel or the particular ideological and intellectual controversies and debates would certainly help, though it is not a requirement to understand the essential arguments in each of the essays.

The main objection is to Anderson's assessment of Engels.

While Anderson is careful to note the 'highly significant' contributions of Engels, he largely agrees with 'the philosophical critique of his tendency towards positivism by Lukács... his reductionist writings on gender even after studying Marx's far subtler treatment in the 1879-92 notebooks... his disparagement and misreading of the strength of the Union side in the U.S. Civil War, and his editing of Capital, Vol. I.'⁷⁶

Fair enough, although it is also fair to say that most of the criticisms of Engels in general are equally applicable to Marx. Intellectually, some figures have sought to 'rescue' Marx from Engels, ascribing to Engels alone the blame for Second International determinism (Althusser and Lukács) and the crudities of the Stalinist version of dialectical materialism.

Dialectical materialism, at least in its Stalinist version, had strongly positivistic qualities, especially evident in the work of its English popularisers like Maurice Cornforth, and French popularisers like Georges Politzer. Engels was much more nuanced than either, although a positivistic element can be read into certain writings of his.

As Joost Kircz explains: 'The Diamat ideology of Stalinism is a prime example of taking creative reasoning out of its socio-historical context and recasting it in eternal truisms.'⁷⁷

Herbert Marcuse, Georg Lukács, Karel Kosík and Raya Dunayevskaya, whatever the strengths and limitations of their own politics and perspectives, were four individuals who sought to do the opposite without ceasing to be dialecticians or Marxists.

Moreover, for all the real determinism evident in the thinking in the Second International's leading thinkers, it is perhaps sometimes a little overstated.

Exaggerating the differences between the two life-long intellectual partners strikes this author as a largely unnecessary and unfruitful exercise. To be fair Anderson makes an effort not to do that – but it does read like that is the direction he is more than once heading in.

While nobody could disagree with Anderson that we need to assess what Engels had to offer critically, like with other Marxist figures (Luxemburg, Bukharin, Lenin, Trotsky) the framing of them as 'post-Marx Marxists in a negative sense' (and here Anderson is following Dunayevskaya) seems unhelpful.⁷⁸

Does it matter whether or not such figures 'do not measure up to Marx' as Anderson puts it?⁷⁹ What about aspects of their political and intellectual activities that arguably exceeded those of Marx? It seems to lead ultimately into an argument about who was better, smarter, or less compromised

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 169.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 220.

⁷⁷ Kircz, J 2014, 'Elements of an essay on human change', in R. Farris (ed.) *Returns of Marxism: Marxist Theory in a Time of Crisis*, IIRE, Amsterdam, p. 174.

⁷⁸ Anderson, K 2020, *Dialectics of Revolution: Hegel, Marxism, and its critics through a lens of race, class, gender and colonialism*, Daraja Press, Ottawa, p. 222.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 222.

intellectually and politically as a result of the historical role they played in their time.

The 'power of the negative as the creative element', words written by Dunayevskaya (echoing Marx's 1844 manuscripts) was a central concern of hers, and it is for Anderson.⁸⁰ Such power points in the direction of new beginnings, the 'dialectic of negativity as the moving and creative principle' as Marx described it.⁸¹

To give the last word to Karel on dialectics – it 'dissolves fetishized artifacts both of the world of things and the world of ideas, in order to penetrate to their result.'⁸²

For communists today, that is just the first step in unlocking 'the present that is in the future' as CLR James once said, and dissolving the present day structures that uphold oppression and unjustifiable hierarchies.⁸³

All so the red shoots of a universalist emancipatory project breaking through the concrete – and pseudoconcrete – can flourish in the air of freedom.

About Fightback (Aotearoa/Australasia)

Fightback is a trans-Tasman socialist media project with a magazine, a website, and other platforms. We believe that a structural analysis is vital in the task of winning a world of equality and plenty for all. Capitalism, our current socio-economic system, is not only exploiting people and planet – but is designed to operate this way. Therefore, we advocate a total break with the current system to be replaced by one designed and run collectively based on principles of freedom, mutual aid, and social need.

Fightback is a trans-Tasman organization, operating in Aotearoa and Australia. In the modern era of free movement across the Tasman, 'Australasia' is becoming a reality in a way it has not been since the 19th century. So many New Zealanders (tauwi as well as tangata whenua) now live and work in Australia – and decisions made in one country increasingly impact the other, as the inter-governmental controversy surrounding the Manus Island detention camp shows.

We wish to engage socialists from both sides of the Tasman – in particular, socialists from Aotearoa living and working in Australia – to continue the lines of analysis and directions of organization which we have been pursuing. Beyond the dogmas of 'sect Marxism'; beyond national boundaries; towards a genuinely decolonised, democratic, feminist and queer-friendly anti-capitalism.

We recognise that capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa and Australia through colonisation. While we draw substantially on European whakapapa and intellectual traditions, we seek to break the unity of the European colonial project, in favour of collective self-determination and partnership between tangata whenua and tauwi. We recognise that this must be a learning process.

While we draw inspiration and lessons from history, theoretical agreement on past revolutions is not the basis for our unity. Rather, we unify around a common programme for transformation here and now.

80 *Ibid*, p. 168.

81 *Ibid*, p. 164.

82 *Ibid*, p. 201.

83 *Ibid*, p. 191.

Fightback's Points of Unity

Economic & Social Justice. White supremacist, capitalist patriarchy exploits the working majority. We support all movements for redistribution, recognition and representation (as put by socialist feminist Nancy Fraser), from the workplace to the wider community. The average union member in both Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia is a woman, so the struggle for economic democracy must be intersectional: sacrificing no liberation struggle for the sake of another.

Transnational Solidarity. Struggles in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia are interconnected with transnational struggles: to give just one example, refugee rights here are connected with the wars that force people to seek asylum. We stand against racist nationalism and imperialism, and for self-determination everywhere. This transnational solidarity crosses all geopolitical 'camps': neither Washington nor Beijing truly supports self-determination.

Radical Democracy. Socialism suffocates without democracy, as the catastrophic failures of the 20th century demonstrate. Radical democracy cannot be purely majoritarian (as this may curtail the rights of minorities), and cannot be guaranteed by states: to quote slavery abolitionist Frederick Douglass, power concedes nothing without a demand. Radical democracy is defined by the ongoing fight for self-determination in all sectors of life. We also stand for democracy within the movements, including the need for principled debate.

Popular Science. In an era marked by populist fake news from left to right, we seek to 'intellectually vaccinate' the movements against conspiracy theories and pseudo-science. As German socialists Ferdinand Lassalle and Rosa Luxemburg asserted, we must bring workers and science together, rather than locking knowledge away in paywalled journals. Although scientific research doesn't exist outside social context, and isn't the only form of knowledge, it's a necessary check on our assumptions.

Ecosocialism. Extractive capital is driving mass extinction. We support investment in sustainable infrastructure: high quality public housing, public transport, and green cities. Landlords, extractive industries, agribusiness and other beneficiaries of the status quo are preventing such sustainable solutions, so power must be taken out of their hands and given to communities.

Anti-fascism. Fascism and similar movements claim to be anti-capitalist or anti-imperialist, but instead redirect working people's anger against scapegoat groups or fictitious conspiracies. We fight all tendencies on the Left and Right which scapegoat and demonise the victims of capitalism and imperialism – including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, transphobia, and the smearing of people fighting oppression as "terrorists". Only solidarity of all oppressed and exploited communities can solve the social problems we face.

Constitutional Transformation. Capitalism was established in Australasia through colonisation, and sovereignty was never ceded. As a tau iwi (non-indigenous) based group in Aotearoa/New Zealand and so-called Australia, we support the fight for indigenous-led constitutional transformation. Although we don't yet know exactly what constitutional transformation will look like, it must involve both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, actively engaged in building institutions based on mutual recognition.

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